

IMPS LIGHT THE CORPSE CANDLES ◀ THE DEVIL BLOWS HIS BAGPIPES

BEYOND



COME TO THE SABBATH

THE INFAMOUS MEETING OF THE WITCHES ◀ IN WORDS AND PICTURES

COME TO THE SABBATH

‘Three Friars, says a legend, hid themselves near the Witch Sabbath orgies that they might count the devils; but the Chief of these, discovering the friars, said ‘Reverend Brothers, our army is such that if all the Alps, their rocks and glaciers, were equally divided among us, none would have a pound’s weight.’ This was in one Alpine valley. Anyone who has caught but a glimpse of the world’s Walpurgis Night, as revealed in mythology and folklore, must agree that this courteous devil did not overstate the case. Any attempt to catalogue the evil spectres which have haunted mankind were like trying to count the shadows cast upon the earth by the rising sun.

MONCURE DANIEL CONWAY
DEMONOLOGY AND DEVIL-LORE
1879

Alpine landscape with a deep valley
(1528/32–1605); Lucas van Doetecum,
artist; after Pieter Bruegel the Elder, artist

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Beyond: Issue One

An invocation of the infamous meeting of the witches in words and pictures.

Submissions: If you would like to submit any weird fiction, art, articles, photography or comics for future issues of Beyond, please contact: beyondthesabbath@gmail.com

Walpurgis
rock night



THE WITCHES' SABBATH

JAMES PLATT, JUNIOR

TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL, 1894

Our scene is one of those terrific peaks set apart by tradition as the trysting place of wizards and witches, and of every kind of folk that prefers dark to day. It might have been Mount Elias, or the Brocken, associated with Doctor Faustus. It might have been the Horsel or Venusberg of Tannhaeuser, or the Black Forest. Enough that it was one of these...

Not a star wrinkled the brow of night. Only in the distance the twinkling lights of some town could be seen. Low down in the skirts of the mountain rode a knight, followed closely by his page. We say a knight, because he had once owned that distinction. But a wild and bloody youth had tarnished his ancient shield; the while it kept bright and busy his ancestral sword. Behold him now, little better than a highwayman. Latterly he had wandered from border to border, without finding where to rest his faithful steed.

All authority was in arms against him; Hageck, the wild knight, was posted throughout Germany. More money was set upon his head than had ever been put into his pocket. Pikemen and pistoliers had dispersed his following. None remained to him whom he could call his own, save this stripling who still rode

sturdily at the tail of his horse. Him also, the outlaw had besought, even with tears, to abandon one so ostensibly cursed by stars and men. But in vain. The boy protested that he would have no home, save in his master's shadow.

They were an ill-assorted pair. The leader was all war-worn and weather-worn. Sin had marked him for its own and for the wages of sin. The page was young and slight, and marble pale. He would have looked more at home at the silken train of some great lady, than following at these heels from which the gilded spurs had long been hacked. Nevertheless, the music of the spheres themselves sings not more sweetly in accord than did these two hearts.

The wild knight, Hageck, had ascended the mountain as far as was possible to four-legged roadsters. Therefore he reined in his horse and dismounted, and addressed his companion. His



*Demons and witches arrive at the sabbath, 1755.
Jacques Aliamet after D Teniers the younger, 18th
Century. A tiny homunculus with hair down to its feet
stands in the glow of the lantern at the centre*

rijksmuseum



voice was now quite gentle, which on occasion could quench mutiny, and in due season dry up the taste of blood in the mouths of desperate men.

"Time is that we must part, Enno."

"Master, you told me we need never part."

"Let be, child, do you not understand me? I hope with your own heart's hope that we shall meet again to-morrow in this same tarrying place. But I have not brought you to so cursed a place without some object. When I say that we must part, I mean that you must take charge of our horses while I go further up the mountain upon business, which for your own sake you must never share."

"And is this your reading of the oath of our brotherhood which we swore together?"

"The oath of our brotherhood, I fear, was writ in water. You are, in fact, the only one of all my company that has kept faith with me. For that very reason I would not spare your neck from the halter, nor your limbs from the wheel. But also for that very reason I will not set your immortal soul in jeopardy."

"My immortal soul! Is this business then unhallowed that you go upon? Now I remember me that this mountain at certain seasons is said to be haunted by evil spirits. Master, you also are bound by our path to tell me all."

"You shall know all, Enno, were oaths even cheaper than they are. You have deserved by your devotion to be the confessor of your friend."

"Friend is no name for companionship such as ours. I am sure you would die for me. I believe I could die for you, Hageck."

"Enough, you have been more than brother to me. I had a brother once, after the fashion of this world, and it is his envious hand which has placed me where I stand. That was before I knew you, Enno, and it is some sweets in my cup at any rate, that had he not betrayed me I

should never have known you. Nevertheless, you will admit that since he robbed me of the girl I loved, even your loyal heart is a poor set off for what fate and fraternity took from me. In fine, we both loved the same girl, but she loved me, and would have none of my brother. She was beautiful, Enno – how beautiful you can never guess that have not yet loved."

"I have never conceived any other love than that I bear you."

"Tush, boy, you know not what you say. But to return to my story. One day that I was walking with her my brother would have stabbed me. She threw herself between and was killed upon my breast."

He tore open his clothes at the throat and showed a great faded stain upon his skin.

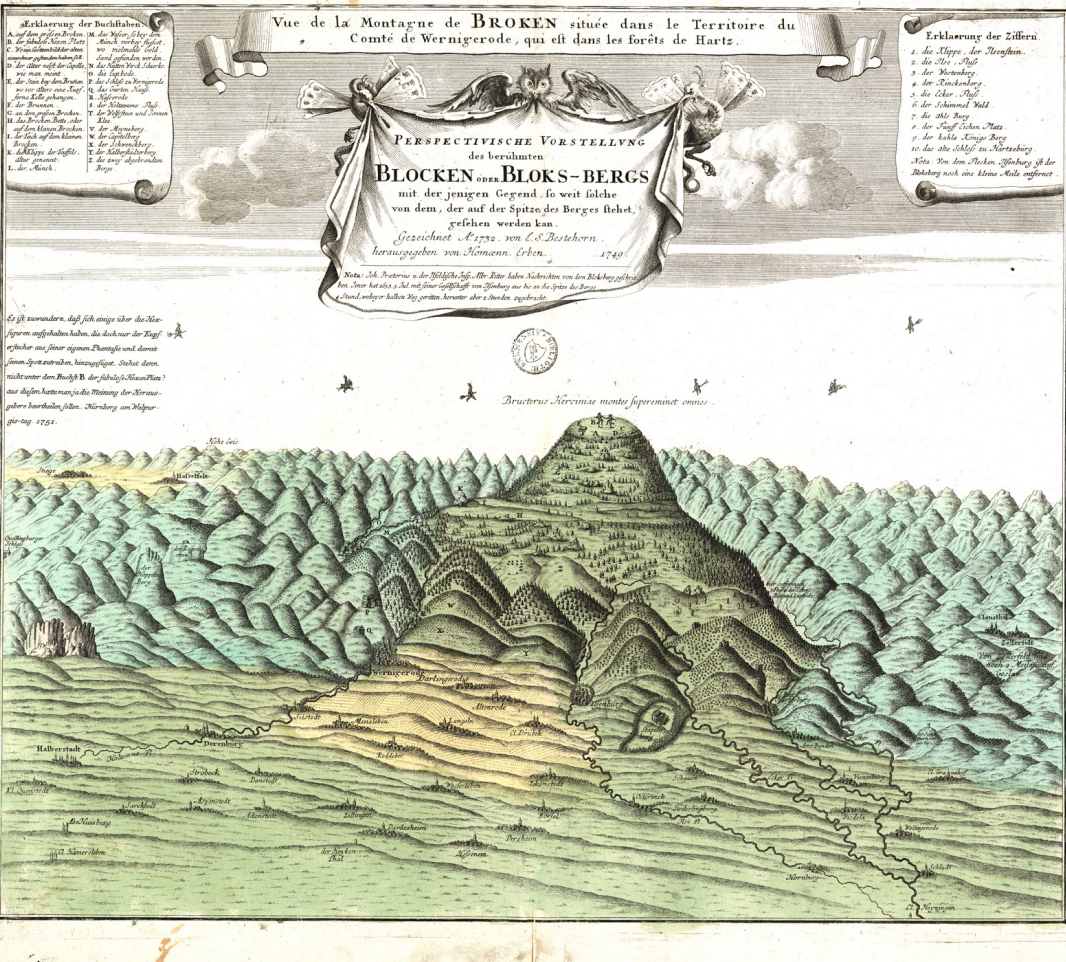
"The hangman's brand shall fade," he cried, "ere that wash out. Accursed be the mother that bore me seeing that she also first bore him! The devil squat down with him in his resting, lie with him in his sleeping, as the devil has sat and slept with me every noon and night since that deed was done. Never give way to love of woman, Enno, lest you lose the one you love, and with her lose the balance of your life."

"Alas! Hageck, I fear I never shall."

"Since that miscalled day, blacker than any night, you know as well as any one the sort of death in life I led. I had the good or evil luck to fall in with some broken men like myself, fortune's foes and foes of all whom fortune cherishes, you among them. Red blood, red gold for a while ran through our fingers. Then a turn of the wheel, and, presto, my men are squandered to every wind that blows – I am a fugitive with a price upon my head!"

"And with one comrade whom, believe me, wealth is too poor to buy."

"A heart above rubies. Even so. To such alone would I confide my present purpose. You must know that my brother was a student



L.S. Bestehorn's old map of the Brocken, from 1732, featuring a group of witches circling the summit on their way to the Sabbath. 'The horn of Satan grimly sounds; On Blocksberg's flank strange din resounds; And spectres crowd its summit high' (Matthison)

of magic of no mean repute, and before we quarrelled had given me some insight into its mysteries. Now that I near the end of my tether I have summed up all the little I knew, and am resolved to make a desperate cast in this mountain of despair. In a word, I intend to hold converse with my dead sweetheart before I die. The devil shall help me to it for the love he bears me."

"You would invoke the enemy of all mankind?"

"Him and none other. Aye, shudder not, nor seek to turn me from it. I have gone over it again and again. The gates of Hell are set no firmer than this resolve."

"God keep Hell far from you when you call it!"

"I had feared my science was of too elemen-

tary an order to conduct an exorcism under any but the most favourable circumstances. Hence our journey hither. This place is one of those where parliaments of evil are held, where dead and living meet on equal ground. To-night is the appointed night of one of these great Sabbaths. I propose to leave you here with the horses. I shall climb to the topmost peak, draw a circle that I may stand in for my defence, and with all the vehemence of love deferred, pray for my desire."

"May all good angels speed you!"

"Nay, I have broken with such. Your good wish, Enno, is enough."

"But did we not hear talk in the town about a hermit that spent his life upon the mountain top, atoning for some sin in day-long prayer and mortification? Can this evil fellowship of which you speak still hold its meetings upon a spot which has been attached in the name of Heaven by one good man?"

"Of this hermit I knew nothing until we reached the town. It was then too late to seek another workshop. Should what you say be correct, and this holy man have purged this plague spot, I can do no worse than pass the night with him, and return to you. But should the practices of witch and wizard continue as of yore, then the powers of evil shall draw my love to me, be she where she may. Aye, be it in that most secret nook of heaven where God retires when He would

weep, and where even archangels are never suffered to tread."

"O all good go with you!"

"Farewell, Enno, and if I never return count my soul not so lost but what you may say a prayer for it now and again, when you have leisure."

"I will not outlive you!"

The passionate words were lost on Hageck, who had already climbed so far as to be out of hearing. He only knew vaguely that something



The Devil and Dr Faustus meet

Wellcome Collection

was shouted to him, and waved his hand above his head for a reply. On and on he climbed. Time passed. The way grew harder. At last exhausted, but fed with inward exaltation, he reached the summit. It was of considerable extent and extremely uneven. The first thing our hero noticed was the cave of the hermit. It could be nothing else, although it was closed with an iron door. A new departure, thought

Hageck to himself, as he hammered upon it with the pommel of his sword, for a hermit's cell to be locked in like a fortress.

"Open, friend," he cried, "in heaven's name, or in that of the other place if you like it better."

The noise came from within of a bar being removed. The door opened. It revealed a mere hole in the rock, though large enough, it is true, to hold a considerable number of persons. Furniture was conspicuous by its absence. There was no sign even of a bed, unless a coffin that grinned in one corner served the occupant's needs. A skull, a scourge, a crucifix, a knife for his food, what more does such a hermit want? His feet were bare, his head was tonsured, but his eyebrows were long and matted, and fell like a screen over burning maniacal eyes. A fanatic, every inch of him. He scrutinised the invader from top to toe. Apparently the result was unsatisfactory. He frowned.

"A traveller," said he, "and at this unholy hour. Back, back, do you not know the sinister reputation of this time and place?"

"I know your reputation to be of the highest, reverend father; I could not credit what rumour circulates about this mountain top when I understood that one of such sanctity had taken up a perpetual abode here."

"My abode is fixed here for the very reason that it is a realm of untold horror. My task is to win back, if I can, to the dominion of the church this corner, which has been so long unloved that it cries aloud to God and man. This position of my own choice is no sinecure. Hither at stated times the full brunt of the Sabbath sweeps to its rendezvous. Here I defy the Sabbath. You see that mighty door?"

"I had wondered, but feared to ask, what purpose such a barrier could serve in such a miserable place."

"You may be glad to crouch behind it if you

stay here much longer. At midnight, Legion, with all the swirl of all the hells at his back, will sweep this summit like a tornado. Were you of the stuff that never trembles, yet you shall hear such sounds as shall melt your backbone. Avoid hence while there is yet time."

"But you, if you remain here, why not I?"

"I remain here as a penance for a crime I did, a crime which almost takes prisoner my reason, so different was it from the crime I set out to do, so deadly death to all my hopes. I am on my knees throughout the whole duration of this pandemonium that I tell you of, and count thick and fast my beads during the whole time. Did I cease for one second to pray, that second would be my last. The roof of my cavern would descend and efface body and soul. But you, what would you do here?"

"I seek my own ends, for which I am fully prepared. To confer with a shade from the other world I place my own soul in jeopardy. For the short time that must elapse, before the hour arrives when I can work, I ask but a trifle of your light and fire."

"The will-o'-the-wisp be your light, Saint Anthony's your fire! Do you not recognise me?"

The wild knight bent forward and gazed into the hermit's inmost eye, then started back, and would have fallen had his head not struck the iron door. This recalled him to his senses, and after a moment he stood firm again, and murmured between his teeth, "My brother!"

"Your brother," repeated the holy man, "your brother, whose sweetheart you stole and drove me to madness and crime."

"I drove you to no madness, I drove you to no crime. The madness, the crime you expiate here, were all of your own making. She loved me, and me alone – you shed her blood, by accident I confess, yet you shed it, and not all the prayers of your lifetime can gather up one drop of it. What soaked into my own brain remains

there for ever, though I have sought to wash it out with an ocean of other men's blood."

"And I," replied the hermit, and he tore his coarse frock off his shoulders, "I have sought to drown it with an ocean of my own."

He spoke truth. Blood still oozed from his naked flesh, ploughed into furrows by the scourge.

"You, that have committed so many murders," he continued, "and who have reproached me so bitterly for one, all the curses of your dying victims, all the curses I showered upon you before I became reformed have not availed to send you yet to the gibbet or to the wheel. You are one that, like the basil plant, grows ever the rifer for cursing. I remember I tried to lame you, after you left home, by driving a rusty nail into one of your footsteps, but the charm refused to work. You were never the worse for it that I could hear. They say the devil's children have the devil's luck. Yet some day shall death trip up your heels."

"Peace, peace," cried the wild horseman, "let ill-will be dead between us, and the bitterness of death be passed, as befits your sacred calling. Even if I see her for one moment to-night, by the aid of the science you once taught me, will you not see her for eternity in heaven some near day?"

"In heaven," cried the hermit, "do I want to see her in heaven? On earth would I gladly see her again and account that moment cheap if weighed against my newly discovered soul! But that can never be. Not the art you speak of, not all the dark powers which move men to sin, can restore her to either of us as she was that day. And she loved you. She died to save you. You have nothing to complain of. But to me she was like some chaste impossible star."

"I loved her most," muttered the outlaw.

"You loved her most," screamed the hermit. "Hell sit upon your eyes! Put it to the test. Look around. Do you see anything of her here?"

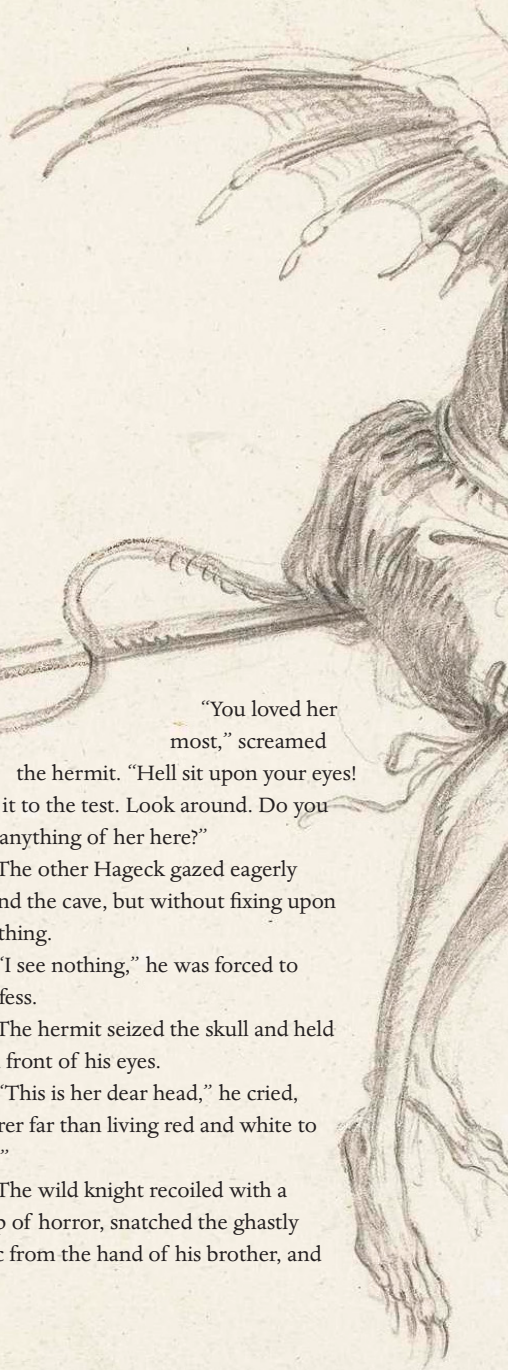
The other Hageck gazed eagerly round the cave, but without fixing upon anything.

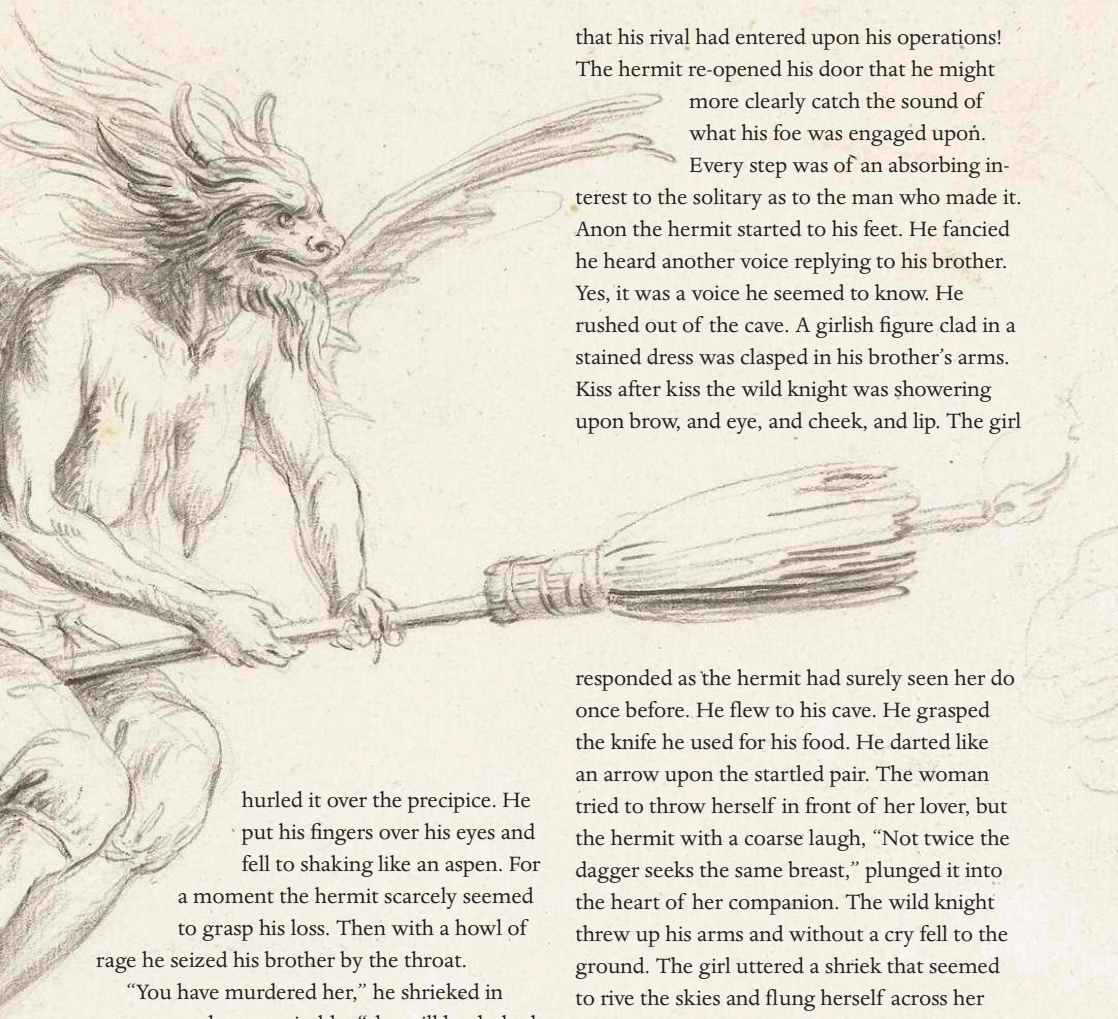
"I see nothing," he was forced to confess.

The hermit seized the skull and held it in front of his eyes.

"This is her dear head," he cried, "fairer far than living red and white to me!"

The wild knight recoiled with a gasp of horror, snatched the ghastly relic from the hand of his brother, and





that his rival had entered upon his operations! The hermit re-opened his door that he might more clearly catch the sound of what his foe was engaged upon.

Every step was of an absorbing interest to the solitary as to the man who made it. Anon the hermit started to his feet. He fancied he heard another voice replying to his brother. Yes, it was a voice he seemed to know. He rushed out of the cave. A girlish figure clad in a stained dress was clasped in his brother's arms. Kiss after kiss the wild knight was showering upon brow, and eye, and cheek, and lip. The girl

hurled it over the precipice. He put his fingers over his eyes and fell to shaking like an aspen. For a moment the hermit scarcely seemed to grasp his loss. Then with a howl of rage he seized his brother by the throat.

"You have murdered her," he shrieked in tones scarcely recognisable, "she will be dashed to a hundred pieces by such a fall!"

He threw the outlaw to the ground and, retreating to his cave, slammed the door behind him, but his heart-broken sobs could still be heard distinctly. It was very evident that he was no longer in his right mind. The wild knight rose somewhat painfully and limped to a little distance where he perceived a favourable spot for erecting his circle. The sobbing of the crazed hermit presently ceased. He was aware

responded as the hermit had surely seen her do once before. He flew to his cave. He grasped the knife he used for his food. He darted like an arrow upon the startled pair. The woman tried to throw herself in front of her lover, but the hermit with a coarse laugh, "Not twice the dagger seeks the same breast," plunged it into the heart of her companion. The wild knight threw up his arms and without a cry fell to the ground. The girl uttered a shriek that seemed to rive the skies and flung herself across her dead. The hermit gazed at it stupidly and rubbed his eyes. He seemed like one dazed, but slowly recovering his senses. Suddenly he started, came as it were to himself, and pulled the girl by the shoulder.

"We have not a minute to lose," he cried, "the great Sabbath is all but due. If his body remains out here one second after the stroke of twelve, his soul will be lost to all eternity. It will be snatched by the fiends who even now are bound to it. Do you not see yon shadowy hosts

– but I forget, you are not a witch.”

“I see nothing,” she replied, sullenly, rising up and peering round. The night was clear, but starless.

“I have been a wizard,” he answered, “and once a wizard always a wizard, though I now fight upon the other side. Take my hand and you will see.”

She took his hand, and screamed as she did so. For at the instant there became visible to her these clouds of loathsome beings that were speeding thither from every point of the compass. Warlock, and witch, and wizard rode post on every conceivable graceless mount. Their motion was like the lightning of heaven, and their varied cries – owlet hoot, caterwaul, dragon-shout – the horn of the Wild Hunter, and the hurly of risen dead – vied with the bay of Cerberus to the seldseen moon. A forest of whips was flourished aloft. The whirr of wings raised dozing echoes. The accustomed mountain shook and shivered like a jelly, with the fear of their onset.

The girl dropped his hand and immediately lost the power of seeing them. She had learned at any rate that what he said was true.

“Help me to carry the body to the cave,” cried he, and in a moment it was done. The corpse was placed in the coffin of his murderer. Then the hermit crashed his door to its place. Up went bolts and bars. Some loose rocks that were probably the hermit’s chairs and tables were rolled up to afford additional security.

“And now,” demanded the man, “now that we have a moment of breathing space, tell me what woman-kind are you whom I find here with my brother? That you are not her I know (woe is me that I have good reason to know) yet you are as like her as any flower that blows. I loved her, and I murdered her, and I have the right to ask, who and what are you that come to disturb my peace?”

“I am her sister.”

“Her sister! Yes, I remember you. You were a child in those days. Neither I nor my brother (God rest his soul!), neither of us noticed you.”

“No, he never took much notice of me. Yet I loved him as well as she did.”

“You, too, loved him,” whispered the hermit, as if to himself; “what did he do to be loved by two such women?”

“Yes, I loved him, though he never knew it, but I may confess it now, for you are a priest of a sort, are you not, you that shrive with steel?”

“You are bitter, like your sister. She was always so with me.”

“I owe you my story,” she replied more gently; “when she died and he fell into evil courses and went adrift with bad companions, I found I could not live without him, nor with anyone else, and I determined to become one of them. I dressed in boy’s clothes and sought enlistment into his company of free lances. He would have driven me from him, saying it was no work for such as I, yet at last I wheedled it from him. I think there was something in my face (all undeveloped as it was and stained with walnut juice) that reminded him of her he had lost. I followed him faithfully through good and evil, cringing for a look or word from him. We were at last broken up (as you know) and I alone of all his sworn riders remained to staunch his wounds. He brought me hither that he might wager all the soul that was left to him on the chance of evoking her spirit. I had with me the dress my sister died in, that I had cherished through all my wanderings, as my sole reminder of her life and death. I put it on after he had left me, and followed him as fast as my strength would allow me. My object was to beguile him with what sorry pleasure I could, while at the same time saving him from committing the sin of disturbing the dead. God forgive me if there was mixed with it the wholly selfish yearning

to be kissed by him once, only once, in my true character as loving woman, rid of my hated disguise! I have had my desire, and it has turned to apples of Sodom on my lips. You are right. All we can do now is to preserve his soul alive."

She fell on her knees beside the coffin. The hermit pressed his crucifix into her hands.

"Pray!" he cried, and at the same moment the distant clock struck twelve. There came a rush of feet, a thunder at the iron door, the cave rocked like a ship's cabin abruptly launched into the trough of a storm. An infernal whooping and hallooing filled the air

could say, as she pressed the Christ to her lips, was "Lord of my life! My Love." She scarcely heard the hurly-burly that raged outside. Crash after crash resounded against the door, but good steel tempered with holy water is bad to beat. Showers of small pieces of rock fell from the ceiling and the cave was soon filled with dust. Peals of hellish cachinnation resounded after each unsuccessful attempt to break down that defence. Living battering rams pressed it hard, dragon's spur, serpent's coil, cloven hoof, foot of clay. Tall Iniquities set their backs to it, names of terror, girt with earthquake. All

the swart crew dashed their huge bulk against it, rakehelly riders, humans and superhumans, sin and its paymasters. The winds well nigh split their sides with hounding of them on. Evil stars in their courses fought against it. The seas threw up their dead. Haunted houses were no more haunted that night. Graveyards steamed. Gibbets were empty. The ghoul left his half-gnawn corpse, the vampire his victim's throat. Buried treasures rose to earth's surface that their ghostly guardians might swell the fray.

Yet the hermit prayed on, and the woman wept, and the door kept its

outside, mixed with it imprecations that made the strong man blanch. The banner of Destruction was unfurled. All the horned heads were upon them. Thrones and Dominions, Virtues, Princes, Powers. All hell was loose that night, and the outskirts of Hell.

The siege had begun. The hermit told his beads with feverish rapidity. One Latin prayer after another rolled off his tongue in drops of sweat. The girl, to whom these were unintelligible, tried in vain to think of prayers. All she

face to the foe. Will the hour of release never strike? Crested Satans now lead the van. Even steel cannot hold out for ever against those in whose veins instead of blood, runs fire. At last it bends ever so little, and the devilish hubbub is increased tenfold.

"Should they break open the door—" yelled the hermit, making a trumpet of his hands, yet she could not hear what he shouted above the abominable din, nor had he time to complete his instructions. For the door did give, and that



suddenly, with a clang that was heard from far off in the town, and made many a burgher think the last trump had come. The rocks that had been rolled against the door flew off in every direction, and a surging host—and the horror of it was that they were invisible to the girl—swept in.

The hermit tore his rosary asunder, and scattered the loose beads in the faces of the fiends.

"Hold fast the corpse!" he yelled, as he was trampled under foot, and this time he made himself heard. The girl seized the long hair of her lover pressed it convulsively, and swooned.

Years afterwards (as it seemed to her) she awakened and found the chamber still as death, and—yes—this was the hair of death which she still clutched in her dead hand. She kissed it a hundred times before it brought back to her where she was and what had passed. She looked round then for the hermit. He, poor man, was lying as if also dead. But when she could bring herself to release her hoarded treasure, she speedily brought him to some sort of consciousness. He sat up, not without difficulty, and looked around. But his mind, already halfway to madness, had been totally overturned by what had occurred that woeful night.

"We have saved his soul between us," she cried. "What do I not owe you for standing by me in that fell hour?"

He regarded her in evident perplexity. "I cannot think how you come to be wearing that blood-stained dress of hers," was all he replied.

"I have told you," she said, gently, "but you have forgotten that I cherished it through all my wanderings as my sole memento of her glorious death. She laid down the last drop of her blood for him. She chose the better part. But I! my God! what in the world is to become of me?"

"I had a memento of her once," he muttered. "I had her beautiful head, but I have lost it."

"That settles it," she said, "you shall cut off mine."



May day Night-on the



Walpurgis Night, when, according to the belief of millions of people, the devil was abroad – when the graves were opened and the dead came forth and walked. When all evil things of earth and air and water held revel. This very place the driver had specially shunned. This was the depopulated village of centuries ago. This was where the suicide lay; and this was the place where I was, alone – unmanned, shivering with cold in a shroud of snow with a wild storm gathering again upon me! It took all my philosophy, all the religion I had been taught, all my courage, not to collapse in a paroxysm of fright.

BRAM STOKER
**DRACULA'S GUEST AND
OTHER WEIRD STORIES**
1914

Walpurgisnacht: a devil sees witches on broomsticks setting off into the night. Etching by R Girling. Created between 1800 and 1899

Wellcome Collection

THE WITCHES ARE ABROAD TONIGHT

OLIVER MADDOX HUEFFER

A SABBATH-GENERAL, BOOK OF WITCHES, 1909

It is wild weather overhead. All day the wind has been growing more and more boisterous, blowing up great mountains of grey cloud out of the East, chasing them helter-skelter across the sky, tearing them into long ribbons and thrashing them all together into one whirling tangle, through which the harassed moon can scarcely find her way....

The late traveller has many an airy buffet to withstand ere he can top the last ascent and see the hamlet outlined in a sudden glint of watery moonlight at his feet. Those who lie abed are roused by the moaning in the eaves, to mutter fearfully, "The witches are abroad tonight!"

The witch lives by herself in a dingle, a hundred yards beyond the last cottage of the hamlet. The dingle is a wilderness of brush-wood, through which a twisted pathway leads to the witch's doot. Matted branches overhang her roof-tree, and even when the moon, breaking for a moment from its net of cloud, sends down a brighter ray than ordinary, it does but emphasise the secretiveness of the ancient moss-grown thatch and the ill-omened plants, henbane, purple nightshade, or white bryony, that cluster round the walls.

There is but one room – and that of the barest – in the witch's cottage. The village

children, who whisper of hoarded wealth as old Mother Hackett passes them in the gloaming, little know how scant is the fare and small the grace they must look for who have sold themselves to such a master. She sleeps upon the earthen floor, with garnered pine-needles for mattress. She has a broken stool to sit on, and a great iron pot hangs above the slumbering embers on the clay hearth.

It wants still an hour to midnight, this eve of May Day, when there comes a stirring among these same embers. They are thrust aside, and up from beneath them Something heaves its way into the room. It is the size of a fox, black and hairy, shapeless and with many feet. From somewhere in its middle two green eyes shed a baleful light that horribly illuminates the room.

Witches flying to the Sabbath (1797-1799)

Francisco de Goya

• Rijksmuseum



It moves across the floor, after the manner of a great caterpillar, and as it nears her the witch casts a skinny arm abroad and mutters in her sleep. It reaches the bed, lifts itself upon it, and mumbles something in her ear. She awakes, rises upon her elbow, and replies peevishly. She has no fear of the Thing – it is a familiar visitant. She is angry, and scolds it in a shrill old voice for disturbing her too soon. Has she not the Devil's marks upon her – breast and thigh-round, blue marks that are impervious to all pain from without, but itch and throb when it is time for her to go about her devilish business? The Thing takes her scoldings lightly, twitting her with having overslept herself at the last Sabbath – which she denies. They fall a-jesting; she calls it Tom – Vinegar Tom; and they laugh together over old exploits and present purposes.

A moonbeam glints through a hole in the thatch. Where the witch has lain now sits a black cat, larger than any of natural generation – as large, almost, as a donkey. It talks still with the witch's voice, and lingers awhile, the two pairs of green eyes watching each other through the darkness. At last, with a careless greeting, it bounds across the floor, leaps up the wall to the chimney opening, and is gone. The shapeless Thing remains upon the bed. Its sides quiver, it chuckles beneath its breath in a way half-human, yet altogether inhuman and obscene.

The black cat is hastening towards the hamlet under the shadow of the brush-wood. When she comes within sight of the end house, she leaves the path and strikes out into the gorse-clad waste beyond the pasture, keeping to it until she is opposite the cottage of Dickon the waggoner. A child has been born, three days back, to Dickon and Meg his wife. It is not yet baptised, for the priest lives four miles away, beyond the downs, and Dickon has been too pressed with work to go for him.



Tomorrow will be time enough, for it is the healthiest child, not to say the most beautiful, the gossips have ever set eyes upon. Perhaps, if Meg had not forgotten in her new-found happiness how, just after her wedding, when old Mother Hackett passed her door, she made the sign of the cross and cried out upon the old dame for a foul witch, she might not be sleeping so easily now with her first-born on her bosom.

The black cat creeps on under the shadow of a hedge. Old Trusty, the shepherd's dog, left to guard the flock during the night, sees



where she goes, and, taking her for a lurking fox, charges fiercely towards the hedge, too eager to give tongue. But at the first flash of the green eyes as she turns her head, he knows with what he has to deal, and flies whimpering for shelter in the gorse, his tail between his legs. For a dog can tell a witch more readily than can his master – and fears her as greatly.

The black cat being come to Dickon's cottage, waits for a moment to be sure that all is quiet, then leaps upon the low roof, gains the summit, and so descends by way of the

***Witches' Sabbath,
1636. Claes Jacobsz
van der Heck***

Rijksmuseum

chimney to the room where lie the sleeping family. Again it waits, listening to their regular breathing, its tail whipping to and fro in suppressed excitement. It rises upon its hinder legs and makes certain passes in the air, North and South and East and West. It approaches the bed, and softly, softly draws the child from its sleeping mother's arms.

It makes again for the chimney, and in two bounds is in the open air, carrying the child nestled against its warm black fur. Scarcely has it gained the shadow of the hedge when the



Witches' Sabbath, 1608-1612. Attributed to workshop
of print maker Jacob de Gheyn (1565-1629)



Nicolaes de Clerk Excudit.

mother, her sleep disturbed, it may be, by some vague presentiment of danger, opens her eyes. But the warm weight is still upon her breast, and she drops off to sleep again in security. Did you peep into the witch's cottage now, you would find that the black shapeless Thing is gone. For the Devil's imps can take what shape they will in their master's service.

The black cat, with its sleeping charge, hastens back towards the dingle. Reaching the cottage, it places the child upon the bed, turns twice, and in that moment the witch, clad only in her shift, stands where the cat has been. She is awaiting something, and grows anxious and uneasy, hobbling hither and thither about the room, mumbling below her breath, and once, when the child wakes and wails, taking it in her arms and hushing it, almost as might a woman. It is close upon midnight, yet the sign has not come. For the Evil One, being above all things inconstant, never lets his servants know time or place until the last moment, and that in some unlooked-for way.

At last, when she is quite tormented with anxiety lest she have unwittingly angered her master, comes a stealthy clattering of wings upon the thatch, and down through the hole that serves for chimney rustles a black raven with fiery eyes. It flutters straight for the witch's shoulder and there settles, whispering hoarsely in her ear, while the light from its eyes throws her lean features, with their twitching muscles, into pale relief against the darkness. Nodding eager assent to the message, Mother Hackett hobbles to her bed, and, from a safe hiding-place among the rustling pine-needles, draws out a phial. Next she makes for the corner beside the hearth, and picks up the broomstick leaning against the wall. The raven quits her shoulder for the pillow, thence to watch her with its head at an approving angle.

She opens the phial and smears the contents

on the broomstick, head and handle. It is an ointment, and it shines with the phosphorescent light that is born of corruption. Well it may, for it is compounded of black millet and the dried powdered liver of an unbaptised child, just such a one as now lies upon the witch's bed, with the grim raven gazing down on it. The witch – deluded wretch – believes the ointment to have magic powers; that, smeared upon her broomstick, it gives the senseless wood volition and the power to carry her sky-high; or, if she swallow it, that it will render her insensible to pain, so that the worst efforts of the torturer and the executioner shall force her to confess nothing.

The Devil, her master, knows – none better – that no such potency is in any ointment, but that his own hellish magic supports his minions in the air and comes, and he so will, to their aid in time of trial. But this he hides from them, so that in their folly they may be led to murder babes—the sacrifice he loves above all other.

The witch takes a broken eggshell and smears it also with the ointment. She goes to the bed and picks up the child, the broomstick hopping after her across the floor. Being now ready to set out, she steps astride the broom-handle, that holds itself aslant for her easier mounting. She waves her hand to the attendant raven, and with a rush that sends a spirtle of bright sparks up from the embers, she is away – up the chimney, through the overhanging branches, through the ragged clouds, and far on her journey under the stars. Yet, if any should enter the witch's hut then or thereafter till the dawn, they would find her sleeping peacefully upon the bed. The raven, having carried their master's message, has this further duty: to take upon himself the witch's shape until her return, lest any, finding her from home, should scent out her errand.

The wind is from the East. The witch must

A Witches' Sabbath, circa 1650.

Cornelius Saftleven

The Art Institute of Chicago



“To the Sabbath! To the Sabbath!’ they cried.

“On to the Witches’ Sabbath!”

Up and down that narrow hall they danced, the women on each side of him, to the wildest measure he had ever imagined, yet which he dimly, dreadfully remembered, till the lamp on the wall flickered and went out, and they were left in total darkness. And the devil woke in his heart with a thousand vile suggestions and made him afraid.”

ALGERNON BLACKWOOD

ANCIENT SORCERIES

(1908)

steer across it, for the Sabbath-General, as the corvine messenger has told her, is to be held on a lonely peak of the Cevennes, in mid-France. Her task is not of the easiest, for the gusts come fierce and sudden, and the broomstick dips and leaps before them like a cockle-boat on a rough sea. The witch's scanty locks and scantier clothing stream out almost at a right angle, and once the baby in her arms raises its voice in a tiny wail that would soften the heart of any but a servant of the Devil. Up here the moonlight wells down unchecked, turning the clouds below into the shifting semblance of snow mountains and lakes of silver. They open out now and again at the wind's bidding to allow glimpses of the dark, silent earth far down beneath.

So for a time – a little time, for Devil's messengers fly fast – the witch drives onward in mid-air. At last the broomstick slackens speed, seems to hesitate, circles twice or thrice, and then dives earthwards. The hag alights upon the sea-shore, upon a pebbly beach whereon the waves fling themselves in white fury at the lashings of the wind, now grown so high that Mother Hackett can scarcely stand against it. Whether because he foresees some chance of evil-doing, or from mere inconstancy, for he works without method and against reason, the Devil has ordered that she shall not cross the Channel on her broomstick.

She seizes the interval between two waves to launch the eggshell she has brought with her, steps into it, raises the broomstick aloft as sail or ensign, and puts out to sea in the teeth of the gale. The great waves roar far above her head, in foaming whirlpools that might sink a war-fleet, but the eggshell rides triumphantly



***Toads by Theo
van Hoytema,
print maker
(1863-1917)***

Rijksmuseum

among them, dancing upon their crests and shipping never a drop of water on its passage. Nor can the best efforts

of the wind stay its speed. Only once does it deviate from its course, when a straining ship, its spars and sails all splintered and riven, drives through the mist to leeward. As she nears it, the witch rises to her feet, throws out one skinny hand towards it, and shrieks an incantation down the wind. A flicker of lightning shows itself in the East, and a cloud drives over the face of the moon. When its shadow is past, there is no more sign of the ship or its toiling crew upon the lonely face of the waters. Mother Hackett mews gleefully as she speeds Francewards.

Coming to where the low grey coast rises from the waves, she once more sets herself astride the broomstick. As she speeds on, sky-high, towards the meeting-place, she falls in with company bent on the same errand. From all sides they come, converging to the goal, old, lean hags like herself, women in the prime of life, young girls not yet out of their teens. Some bear with them unweaned babes, others children of a larger growth, yet others youths or grown men, as offerings to Satan.

These they carry pillion-wise before them, for in the Devil's kingdom all is awry, imperfect, contrariwise to the ways of Christian folk. Some of them are mounted on goats, some upon great toads, or flying snakes, or reptiles of uncertain shape, or simple broomsticks, as fancy has directed their imperious despot. One – a man – rides side-seated upon a great fiery dragon, that in the distance glows like a newly-risen star. He is a mighty sorcerer, one who commands Satan instead of serving him, coming to the Sabbath for some reason of his own, and mounted on a steed of his own providing.

The meeting-place of the Sabbath-General, as Satan, in mockery of Christian ritual, chooses to call this foregathering of his servants, is a bare peak in the loneliest part of the Cevennes. It stands a little removed from the centre of

a great mountain amphitheatre,
and just below the summit is a
mountain tarn, crystal-pure
and casting back the
starlight as peacefully as
though there were no
such things as witch
or warlock beneath
God's Heaven. Yet it
is not the first time

the same meeting-place has
been chosen, for not a blade of grass, not the
humblest creeping plant, grows upon the sterile
rocks. Every growing thing withered away,
root and branch, when last the forces of Hell
gathered here. So must the place remain, desert
and bare, mute witness of its desecration, until
the Judgment Day.

The witches come skirling down
from the sky like a flight of unclean
birds, circling above the crags,
hovering to choose a settling-place
where no sharp-pointed rock shall
gash their naked feet, chattering

shrilly the while. Those already arrived are
seated in a wide circle on a flat rock-ledge jutting
from the mountain side. They are mostly
witches of the neighbourhood, who have come
afoot and have set out betimes lest they be
detained upon the way. As more and more join
the circle you may find proof that they lie who
declare the Devil's servants mostly women.

It is true that woman, by reason of the
frailty of her nature, seeks more often to pry
into forbidden things, to her own destruction,
and thus there are many more witches than
warlocks or magicians. Yet of those gathered
for this Sabbath-General, for every witch there
is one mortal man, to say nothing of demons;
for while some, as Mother Hackett, have come
alone, others, being the younger and fairer of
the witches, have brought with them two or
even three youths or young men, ready to take
service with the Evil One and cast away their
hope of salvation, as did our Father Adam, at
the bidding of these Delilahs. Thus it is that, in
the unholy dances which are to follow, every
witch will have a man for her partner, save the
most favoured who dance with the superior
demons, for thus the Devil will have it.

Mother Hackett, when she dismounts
from her broomstick, takes her place beside
one Luckie, a gossip of former Sabbaths,
ill-favoured as herself, who comes from the
kingdom of Fife, where she is much feared
for the sudden tempests she raises when the
fishing-fleets are sailing homeward with full
catches. Next to her is a younger witch, fair and
well-born, Sidonia by name, of a noble house
in Mecklenburg. She is a tall, pale girl, with
hair the colour of ripe wheat, and grey-blue eyes.

She is held in high esteem by
Satan, both for her beauty and
for the number of well-born
youths she has delivered into his



hands. Next to her is a witch of Spain, beautiful also, though brown and with black, beady eyes. Between these two there is little love lost, seeing that they are women no less than witches, and either would do the other a mischief could she compass it.

Though all those bidden have joined the circle, there is yet no sign of the Devil's coming. The witches cease their clacking and scan the sky impatiently, muttering curses against their master. Can it be that he means to play them false, having bidden them merely for a jest and to make a mock of them? It would not be for the first time – for his mind is so crafty and so uncertain, his purpose so errant, that not the most favoured of his ministers has any inkling of it.

Suddenly there is an eager rustling around the expectant circle. A figure has appeared in the centre. But their relief fades into angry disappointment. It is not the Devil himself. It is a small, mean, inconsiderable devil, so inferior in the infernal hierarchy that he has not even horns upon his head. The circle grows smaller as the witches press towards him, buzzing with angry questions. They have no fear, no respect for him; he is a servant like themselves. If he have been deputed to represent his master, he must expect to pay dearly for the honour. He scans the lowering faces anxiously and mutters apologies. No doubt their Master is upon the way and will soon arrive.

He himself is but a poor devil, a little devil; they may be sure that he would not think of putting a slight on witches of such eminence. But fair words will not placate them. Already hands are raised to strike him, already some of them are preparing to scratch him with the nails of their little fingers, always worn long and sharp by witches, such being one of the signs you may know them by. Already he has been tweaked and buffeted as earnest of what

he is to look for.

But now another, more dreadful shape looms up in the very centre of the circle, and the angry witches fall back before it in grovelling terror. At first, seen in the dim light of the waning moon, it is shapeless, inchoate. Slowly it takes form before their eyes into the trunk of a great tree, with tangled limbs stretching out from it. It has about it the suggestion of a face, leering and horrible, with set features that half emerge and half conceal themselves in the gnarling of the bark – such a face as a man may see peering after him out of the darkness when he passes, tip-toe, through the depths of an ancient forest at midnight.

Before it the witches make obeisance, turning their backs upon it and bowing to the ground, in mockery of Christian reverence. When they turn again the tree has changed into a goat, its eyes aflame with obscene passion, and, even as they look, the goat fades into a lion with bloody jaws. The lion fades in turn into a man, a comely man in all but his expression, and his eyes, which, whatever his shape, are always those of a goat, bestial and foul. He is dressed all in black, but his face and hands are dull red – for his vitals are consuming in the flames of Hell – and when he raises his hand, his wrist and forearm glow within his cuff as though they were made of molten iron. On his left hand the fingers are grown together into one misshapen claw, for however fair the human seeming into which the Devil moulds himself, you may always know him for what he is, in that some part of him, an ear, foot, or a hand, is horribly misshapen.

Now at last, all being prepared, attendant imps pass round the circle, checking the numbers of those present and who bears the Devil's mark and who must still receive it, and who has carried out her appointed task and who has failed. Returning, they whisper the tale



THE WITCHES FESTIVAL

into their master's ear, who gibbers with delight and leaps into the air and cracks his heels together, for there is nothing noble or of dignity about him, being in all things mean and petty, a thing of low vices rather than of heroic crimes. Thereafter he sits upon a throne, seemingly of gold, that rises from the earth to receive him, while his attendants hold aloft candles made of the fat of drowned mariners, burning with a pale blue light. One by one he calls the witches before him, calling them by nicknames, as "Old Toothless," or "Wag-in-the-wind," or "Cozling," but never by the names given them in Holy Baptism.

Two men in the midst of the orgies of a witches' sabbath. Wood engraving

Wellcome Collection

And they, making obscene obeisance before his throne, speak to him thuswise also, calling him "Monsieur," or "Grizzleguts," or other fouler names. Next, standing with her back towards the throne, each in turn makes recital of her foul deeds since their last meeting: how many of God's children she has ruined and undone, what evil spells she has cast upon crops and bestial, what tempests she has raised, how she has fared in furthering her master's kingdom. Those who have done well Satan fondles and caresses, promising them great reward, but the others he hands over to his imps for present punishment.

Thus there is one, plump and well-favoured,



being a witch of Sweden, who, having been given for her task that she shall bring a neighbour's son – a rich young farmer – to her master's allegiance, has failed therein, and that although granted extension of time for the emprise. Her the Devil, losing all further patience, of which he has but little at the best of times, marks out for punishment, and his demons, casting her straightway to the ground, beat her with whips of living snakes and scorpions, and bite and otherwise torment her with tooth and claw, so

that the blood runs from her in streams. And while she yells and screams for mercy, flapping here and there upon the ground like a fish upon a line, the whole assembly shakes with hideous laughter at the grotesqueness of her agony.

Mother Hackett, her turn being come, rises eagerly, knowing that she has done evil full measure since the last Sabbath. The waggoner's child she hands to Gossip Luckie, the time for its presentation being not yet come, and hobbles her fastest to her place before the throne,



Witches' Sabbath within a nocturnal landscape, a necromancer seated at top center wearing a robe and cap inscribed with Kabbalist symbols, below him to left a horse with the head of a beast, a ring of nude dancers to right, a robed figure with the head of a pig to left, various witches, sorcerers, strange animals, and monsters on the ground to left in the foreground, from 'Les Sabbats'. Claude Gillot (1700–1720).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

the churchyard to grace the Sabbath banquet, of three boys who, having stoned her, have ever since gone cross-eyed, vomiting needles incessantly, and of the ship sunk in mid-Channel upon her late crossing. Also there is the unbaptised child she has brought with her, to be devoted to the Devil's service for all time.

When her tale is told she waits yet a long moment, expectant of praise and reward. Praise indeed her master lavishes upon her, though he chides her also for having brought him but a waggoner's brat in place of a child well-born, for in them he delights most – and of future reward great promise. But he speaks as one whose thoughts are elsewhere, and his eyes – which are always the eyes of a lustful goat – wander to where the beauteous Sidonia waits smiling for her turn. So Mother Hackett must hobble back to her place in the circle, her heart full of bitterness and disappointment, feeling that she has been tricked out of her deserts, knowing that she must labour in ill-doing yet another year before she can hope for the rich rewards promised her so many weary years ago, yet still to look for.

And she curses under her breath as Sidonia passes in all the pride of her unholy beauty, going to where the Evil One leans forward in his chair, his eyes glowing like hot coals, and motions to her to come yet nearer as she tells with trills of silvery laughter, that yet is altogether

puckering her old eyes beneath the glare from the surrounding corpse-candles. It is for this that she has borne the hardships, the hatred and persecution of her Christian neighbours, the starvation of hunger and cold during the long winter months since the last Sabbath. Her tale is of murrains cast upon a rich farmer's cattle, of a crop of barley that has withered away beneath her spell, of a tempest raised by her to unroof the priest's tithe-barn three parishes away, of the digging up of bodies from

horrible, of three youths she has bewitched, and how one has hanged himself, cursing the name of God, and how another has murdered his own brother, and now lies in durance awaiting death, and the third she has brought with her to the Sabbath, to enter himself among the Devil's servants, abandoning his hope of Heaven for her sake. Of her tale Satan loses no word, and when she is done he clips her in his arms and fondles her and keeps her beside him throughout what follows.

When all the witches have rendered account, it is the turn of the victims they have brought with them, the unbaptised children first and they of tender years. They are led or carried before the Devil's throne, and stand there, curious and open-eyed, understanding nothing of what is going forward, clustering together in a group, the elder girls holding the infants in their arms and hushing them awkwardly when they cry.

The Evil One speaks to them, suiting his words to their condition, his voice purring like a cat. He draws bright pictures of the reward they may expect for absolute obedience – if they renounce their kindred and, those of them who are baptised, their godfathers and godmothers, and with them God and the Child Jesus. Some of the elder among them demur at this, whereupon he reasons with them, his voice still soft and cruel as a cat's, telling them that what they have learned of Holy Writ is but an old wife's tale, and that there is no God but he who speaks, being master of both worlds. Then his eyes blaze brighter and his voice grows fierce and menacing, and he leads them to the side of the mountain and shows them, far below, a dreadful chasm with fierce flames leaping about it and grim fire-monsters lifting up their open jaws from its centre. It is but a lying vision, conjured up by his hellish arts; but how should such poor babes know false from true?

The witches gather round them and cozen

and threaten, telling them that if they refuse they will be surely cast into the flames, but if they obey they shall have all that a child best loves, full measure. So at last they do as they are bidden, and swear away their young souls and their hope of salvation for ever and ever, and make obeisance to Satan with obscene ceremonies of which they understand nothing, doing all for fear of the witches who instruct them. When all, even to the unweaned babes, are bound for ever to Satan's allegiance, they are led away to the shore of the mountain tarn, whither come great toads swimming up from its clear depths and clambering to the shore. These the children are set to mind, being given little white switches for that end – Satan promising that next year, if they have deserved well, they shall be granted the full privileges of servants of Hell. Childlike, when they have overcome their first horror of the hideous toads, they make play-things of them, seeking to make them gallop with the white switches, and, especially the boys, forgetting all that has passed in the gleefulness of the moment.



Meanwhile the more mature recruits to Satan's army are called in turn before him, to be examined in their love of evil, to make obeisance and to receive his mark – invented by him in impious mockery of our Saviour's wounds and the stigmata borne on their bodies by many of His saints. All this to the accompaniment of rites so foul and bestial that they may not be written down. And next, the present business being disposed of, the whole crew falls a-dancing, men, women, and imps together. Back to back the couples dance, for the most part stark-naked, and some with black cats hanging from their necks or waists, spitting and scratching, and some with hideous toads and serpents pressed to their bosoms, and all capering and gesturing with such lewd and obscene antics that the mind of man can scarcely follow them.

The imps who are of the number hold aloft their corpse-candles, to light their paces, and in the middle of all sits the Devil blowing upon a bag-pipe, sometimes in one form and sometimes in another, as the whim takes him. Higher and higher they leap, and faster and faster grow

their steps, whirling hither and thither under the blue light of the candles, spurred on by the droning of the infernal pipes, until they fall a-gasping. When the last couple has ceased its pirouettes, the Devil – being now again in the form of a man – lays aside his instrument and leads them to where a banquet is prepared for them. The tables are heaped high with all the delicacies of the earth, the rarest fruits, the choicest meats, and the most costly wines, heaped upon golden dishes that might ransom all the kings of Christendom.

For attendants there are demons of inferior rank, who have tricked themselves out into the strangest shapes they can devise. Thus, one has a monstrous nose, shaped like a flute, upon which he plays with his hands. Another has sparks shooting from horns and tail, the which, as they fall upon the table, turn into great beetles. Another, having neither arms nor legs nor head, rolls like a wheel upon his belly, in the centre of which blazes one great eye. Another is nought but a huge mouth, and hops underneath the tables biting the ankles of the witches. While yet another takes the shape of a beaker, whence pours sparkling wine into the goblets of the guests. If they seek to drink, it turns to burning pitch. Thus it is indeed with all the viands, for though they seem all that the heart or belly of man can desire and of all things plenty – saving only salt, for that Satan cannot abide, as recalling the Last Supper upon earth of the Lord Christ – yet being tested they are proved a mockery.

For when the guests stretch out their hands for what they most covet it vanishes from their eyes, and in its place is corruption and rottenness, the reeking flesh of murderers and heretics or of cattle that have died of a mur-

Witches prepare a magic salve. One naked witch is riding through the air mounted upon a goat. Woodcut, 1571





1878.
Grafenfurt Walpurgisnacht.
28.

rain, the entrails of reptiles or the scrapings of middens, with, for drink, water in which drowned suicides have rotted, and such-like. Some of those but newly entered draw back in horror from such fare, whereat the more hardened mock at them, falling upon it themselves with horrid zest.

Grown merry after such feasting, they fall a-rioting, jesting, and playing after such wise as may not be told, until the time is come for their next enterprise, what time the Devil toys with the most well-favoured wantons among them. When at last the signal is given, the whole hellish crew rise into the air again, their master leading them, shrilling and squawking like a flight of wild geese across the darkling sky. The Devil leads them to an old cathedral town, a place of ancient towers and crumbling walls and tall, high-shouldered houses that lean out over narrow lanes as if a-gossiping. Before the

Photo reproduction of (presumably) a drawing entitled 'Witch's Tour (Walpurgis Night)' – 1878
Rijksmuseum

great cathedral is a wide market-place, very busy in the day, but silent now as a graveyard, with only now and then the creaking of some wind-harried sign to tell of human energies.

Four roads meet in the centre of the market-place, and there the Evil One alights, his ministers behind him,

and there his throne is set up facing the portal of the cathedral—for it is thus that Satan loves best to carry on his mockery of Christian ritual. First is gone through a blasphemous parody of Holy Baptism, toads taking the place of children. Each is tricked out in a velvet suit of black or scarlet, with a bell tied to each paw and one hung round its neck. An unfrocked priest, who has been a miracle of shamelessness and is now sold to Satan, performs the blasphemy, and the oldest and foulest witches stand as sponsors, vying with each other in the lewdness of their responses.

While this is going forward a brace of night-rovers, intent upon a deed of sacrilege, come creeping through the shadows round the cathedral walls, seeking to force an entrance into the holy place. Their eyes and ears are at their keenest, lest they be apprehended, but though they look right through the crowd of demons and witches thronging the open market-place, they yet see nothing of them – for, evil-doers though they be, they have not yet lost their chance of salvation, and none but those irrevocably sworn of Satan's following can see what befalls upon a Witches' Sabbath.

The christening of the toads being gone through, follows the yet more blasphemous celebration of the Black Mass. The foresworn priest again officiates, the imps, witches, and demons acting as deacons, acolytes, or worshippers, all impiously mimicking the servants of God. In place of the Host is exalted a black wafer, cut in the form of a triangle, and the whole service of the Mass is gone through backwards from end to beginning.

The onlookers also make their obeisances backwards, with lewd gesture not forgotten, towards where the father of all evil sits grinning and mowing upon his throne over against the cathedral door. Yet are they not permitted to finish their blasphemies, for even as the false priest makes to administer the wafer to an imp, who receives it, for the greater mockery, standing upon his head, the first pale shadow of the dawn creeps up the eastern sky. Seeing it, a lusty cock, roosting in some farmyard beyond the city walls, welcomes it with shrill crowings.

The Devil's brood break off and listen fearfully, for Chanticleer is a servant of God, and held in awe by all demons, witches, and sorcerers as the herald of God's daylight. A rival bird takes up the challenge, and it is echoed far and wide over the countryside. The Evil

One waits no longer, but sinks at once, with his throne, downwards through the cobblestones to his abiding-place, followed by his attendant demons. The witches and sorcerers of the company tarry not, but cast themselves afloat upon the air, wasting no time or breath upon their farewells lest daylight surprise them ere they can reach their homes and all their wickedness be made clear.

Mother Hackett, among the rest, throws herself astride her broom-handle and sails off down the wind. On this her return she wastes no time at the sea-coast, but shoots onward high in the air, through the increasing pallor of the morning.

Over sea and down she flies, and, dropping like a stone into the dingle, enters her cottage by the chimney, unseen even by the earliest ploughman. At her coming the expectant demon in her shape rises from the bed and takes again the semblance of a raven. A few words of greeting and inquiry, and it makes its exit by the road it came, flying off heavily across the fields, regardless of the daylight, for who, seeing a raven fly towards the sea, would think of sorcery or witchcraft?

Who, again, entering her humble cot and seeing there a poor old woman sleeping on a bed of poverty would recognise in her a foul witch, forward in all wickedness and a most potent agent of her master Satan.

For so cunningly do these devilish hags, aided by their master's arts, conceal their exits and their entrances, their spells and incantations, that there be many ignorant men who, openly flouting Holy Writ, declare, even in these enlightened days, that there is no such thing as witchcraft or sorcery, and that they who seek out witches and slay them are no better than cruel murderers of poor helpless old women. Such are the craft and malice of Satan and the folly of mankind.

SHE HEARD THE DEVIL SUMMON THEM

CONFESSIONS OF THE GUERNSEY
WITCHES UNDER TORTURE, 1617

She anointed her back and belly, then having dressed herself she went out her house door: when she was instantly caught up: and carried across hedges and bushes to the bank on the sea shore where the Devil kept his Sabbath...

CONFESSON OF COLLETTE DU MONT

First, the said Collette immediately after the said sentence was pronounced, and before leaving the Court, freely admitted that she was a Witch; at the same time, not wishing to specify the crimes which she had committed, she was taken, along with the others, to the Torture Chamber, and the said question being applied to her, she confessed that she was quite young when the Devil, in the form of a cat: appeared to her: in the Parish of Torteval: as she was returning from her cattle, it being still daylight, and that he took occasion to lead her astray by inciting her to avenge herself on one of her

neighbours, with whom she was then at enmity, on account of some damage which she had suffered through the cattle of the latter; that since then when she had a quarrel with anyone, he appeared to her in the aforesaid form: and sometimes in the form of a dog: inducing her to take vengeance upon those who had angered her: persuading her to cause the death of persons and cattle.

That the Devil having come to fetch her that she might go to the Sabbath, called for her without anyone perceiving it; and gave her a certain black ointment with which (after having stripped herself), she rubbed her back,



La danse du Sabbat, by Émile Bayard. A circle dance of naked witches and demons around the devil standing on a dolmen atop a tumulus, 1870

belly and stomach: and then having again put on her clothes, she went out of her door, when she was immediately carried through the air at a great speed: and she found herself in an instant at the place of the Sabbath, which was sometimes near the parochial burial-ground: and at other times near the seashore in the neighbourhood of Rocquaine Castle: where, upon arrival, she met often fifteen or sixteen Wizards and Witches with the Devils who were there in the form of dogs, cats, and hares: which Wizards and Witches she was unable to recognise, because they were all blackened and disfigured: it was true, however, that she had heard the Devil summon them by their names, and she remembered among others those of Fallaise and Hardie; confessed that on entering the Sabbath: the Devil wishing to summon them commenced with her sometimes.

Admitted that her daughter Marie, wife of Massy, now condemned for a similar crime, was a Witch: and that she took her twice to the Sabbath with her: at the Sabbath, after having worshipped the Devil, who used to stand up on his hind legs, they had connection with him under the form of a dog; then they danced back to back. And after having danced, they drank wine (she did not know what colour it was), which the Devil poured out of a jug into a silver or pewter goblet; which wine did not seem to her so good as that which was usually drunk; they also ate white bread which he presented to them—she had never seen any salt at the Sabbath.

Confessed that the Devil had charged her to call, as she passed, for Isabel le Moygne: when she came to the Sabbath, which she had done several times. On leaving the Sabbath the Devil incited her to commit various evil deeds: and to that effect he gave her certain black powders, which he ordered her to throw upon such persons and cattle as she wished; with this powder

she perpetrated several wicked acts which she did not remember: among others she threw some upon Mr Dolbell, parish minister: and was the occasion of his death by these means. With this same powder she bewitched the wife of Jean Maugues: but denied that the woman's death was caused by it: she also touched on the side, and threw some of this powder over the deceased wife of Mr Perchard, the minister who succeeded the said Dolbell in the parish, she being enceinte (pregnant) at the time, and so caused the death of her and her infant – she did not know that the deceased woman had given her any cause for doing so.

Upon the refusal of the wife of Collas Tottevin to give her some milk: she caused her cow to dry up, by throwing upon it some of this powder: which cow she afterwards cured again by making it eat some bran, and some terrestrial herb that the Devil gave her.

CONFESSION OF MARIE BECQUET

Marie, wife of Pierre Massy, after sentence of death had been pronounced against her, having been put to the question, confessed that she was a Witch; and that at the persuasion of the Devil, who appeared to her in the form of a dog: she gave herself to him: that when she gave herself to him he took her by the hand with his paw: that she used to anoint herself with the same ointment as her mother used: and had been to the Sabbath upon the bank near Rocquaine Castle with her, where there was no one but the Devil and her as it seemed: in the aforesaid form in which she had seen him several times.

She was also at the Sabbath on one occasion among others in the road near Collas Tottevin's; every time that she went to the Sabbath, the Devil came to her, and it seemed as though he transformed her into a female dog; she said that upon the shore, near the said Rocquaine:

the Devil, in the form of a dog, having had connection with her, gave her bread and wine, which she ate and drank.

The Devil gave her certain powders: which powders he put into her hand, for her to throw upon those whom he ordered her: she threw some of them by his orders upon persons and cattle: notably upon the child of Pierre Brehaut. Item, upon the wife of Jean Bourgaize, while she was enceinte. Item, upon the child of Leonard le Messurier.

CONFESSION OF ISABEL BECQUET

Isabel, wife of Jean le Moygne, having been put to the question, at once confessed that she was a Witch: and that upon her getting into a quarrel with the woman Girarde, who was her sister-in-law: the Devil, in the form of a hare, took occasion to tempt her: appearing to her in broad daylight in a road near her house: and persuading and inciting her to give herself to him: and that he would help her to avenge herself on the said Girarde, and everybody else: to which persuasion she would not at the moment condescend to yield: so he at once disappeared: but very soon he came again to her in the same road, and pursuing his previous argument: exhorted her in the same terms as above: that done, he left her and went away, after having previously put her a sackful of parsnips; she then took a certain black powder wrapped in a cloth which he placed; which powder she kept by her.

He appeared to her another time under the same form in the town district, inciting her anew to give herself to him, but she not wishing to comply, he next made a request to her to give him some living animal: whereupon she returned to her dwelling and fetched a chicken, which she carried to him to the same place where she had left him, and he took it: and after having thanked her he made an appoint-

ment for her to be present the next morning before daylight at the Sabbath, promising that he would send for her: according to which promise, during the ensuing night, the old woman Collette du Mont, came to fetch her, and gave her some black ointment, which she had had from the Devil; with this (after having stripped herself) she anointed her back and belly, then having dressed herself again she went out of her house door: when she was instantly caught up: and carried across hedges and bushes to the bank on the sea shore, in the neighbourhood of Rocquaine Castle, the usual place where the Devil kept his Sabbath; no sooner had she



arrived there than the Devil came to her in the form of a dog, with two great horns sticking up: and with one of his paws (which seemed to her like hands) took her by the hand: and calling her by her name told her that she was welcome: then immediately the Devil made her kneel down: while he himself stood up on his hind legs; he then made her express detestation of the Eternal in these words: I renounce God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost; and then caused her to worship and invoke himself in these terms: Our Great Master, help us! with a special compact to be faithful to him; and when this was done he had connection with her in the aforesaid form of a dog, but a little larger: then she and the others danced with him back to back: after having danced,

the Devil poured out of a jug some black wine, which he presented to them in a wooden bowl, from which she drank, but it did not seem to her so good as the wine which is usually drunk: there was also bread— but she did not eat any: confessed that she gave herself to him for a month: they returned from the Sabbath in the same manner that they went there.

The second time she was at the Sabbath was after the old woman Collette had been to fetch her, and she anointed herself with the ointment as above stated; declared, that on entering the Sabbath, she again had connection with the Devil and danced with him; after having danced, and upon his solicitation to prolong the time, she gave herself to him for three years; at the Sabbath the Devil used to summon the Wizards and Witches in regular order (she remembered very well having heard him call the old woman Collette the first, in these terms: Madame the Old Woman Becquette): then the woman Fallaise; and afterwards the woman Hardie. Item, he also called Marie, wife of Massy, and daughter of the said Collette. Said that after them, she herself was called by the Devil: in these terms: The Little Becquette: she also heard him call there Collas Becquet, son of the said old woman (who [Collas] held her by the hand in dancing, and someone [a woman] whom she did not know, held her by the other hand): there were about six others there she did not know: the said old woman was always the nearest to the Devil: occasionally while some were dancing, others were having connection with the Devils in the form of dogs; they remained at the Sabbath about three or four hours, not more.

While at the Sabbath the Devil marked her at the upper part of the thigh: which mark having been examined by the midwives, they reported that they had stuck a small pin deeply into it, and that she had not felt it, and that no blood

had issued: she did not know in what part the Devil had marked the others: those who came first to the place of the Sabbath, waited for the others; and all the Wizards and Witches appeared in their proper forms: but blackened and disfigured so that they could not be recognised.

The Devil appeared sometimes in the form of a goat at the Sabbath; never saw him in other forms: on their departure he made them kiss him behind, and asked them when they would come again: he exhorted them always to be true to him: and to do evil deeds, and to this end he gave them certain black powders, wrapped in a cloth, for them to throw upon those whom they wished to bewitch: on leaving the Sabbath, the Devil went away in one direction and they in the other: after he had taken them all by the hand: At the instigation of the Devil she threw some of the powder over several persons and cattle: notably over Jean Jehan, when he came to her house to look for a pig. Item, over the child of James Gallienne, and over others. Item, over the cattle of Brouart, and of others.

It was the Devil that was seen at the said Gallienne's house in the form of a rat and a weazle, she herself being then in the neighbourhood of Gallienne's house, and he [the Devil] came to her in the form of a man, and struck her several blows on the face and head: by which she was bruised and torn in the way that she was seen the next day by Thomas Sohier. And she believed that the cause of this maltreatment was because she would not go with the Devil to the house of the said Gallienne.

She never went to the Sabbath except when her husband remained all night fishing at sea.

Whenever she wanted to bewitch anyone and her powder happened to have been all used up, the Devil appeared to her and told her to go to such a place, which he named, for some more, and when she did so, she never failed to find it there.



HENBANE
(HYOSCYAMUS NIGER)

“The witches drank the decoction of henbane and had those dreams for which they were tortured and executed. It was also used for witches’ ointments and was used for making weather and conjuring spirits.”

*The Round of the Sabbath
or Witches' Sabbath, 1835.*
Louis Boulanger

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

